

VITALY BIANKI

THE FIRST HUNT



Illustrated by Elizaveta Radlova



Puppy was sick and tired of chasing chickens around the yard. "I'm going to track down wild birds and beasts," he decided. So he ran toward the meadow.



As he ran about, wild beasts and birds and insects saw him. And each began to think, "I can easily protect myself."



Meanwhile Puppy had run up to the pond and spied Bittern, standing by the reeds on one leg. The water reached to her knee.

"O-ho! " thought Puppy, "I'll catch her right now." He poised himself to spring onto her back.



But Bittern glanced at him and
strode into the reeds.

The wind whipped about the pond.
The reeds bent and swayed

back and forth,

back and forth.

Brown and yellow stripes swayed
before Puppy's eyes

back and forth,

back and forth.



Puppy opened his eyes wide and stared and stared, but he could not spot Bittern in the reeds. "Huh," he Thought, "'Bittern has tricked me. I'm not about to jump into an empty patch of reeds! I'll just catch myself another kind of bird.

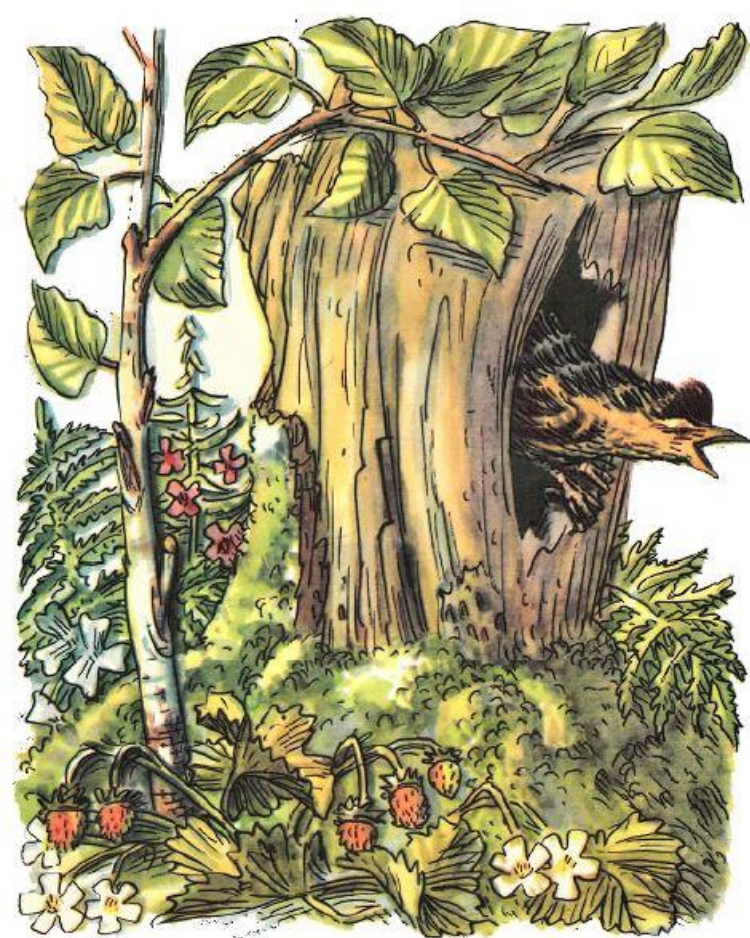
He ran over to a hillock and gazed about. There sitting on the ground was Hoopoe. The bird was playing with his topknot, now opening it wide, now closing it tight.



"Aha!" thought Puppy, "I'll pounce on him from this hillock right now!"

But Hoopoe fell to the ground, spread his wings, opened his tail, and raised his beak in the air. Puppy stared. There was no bird at all, only a many-coloured rag from which a crooked needle protruded.

Puppy marvelled. What had become of Hoopoe? "Could I really have taken this coloured rag for a bird!"



He dashed over to a tree and sure enough, a small bird was perched on one of its branches, Wryneck.

Puppy rushed at her, but Wryneck scuttled into a hollow in the tree.

"Oho! " thought Puppy. "I have her now!" He stood up on his hind legs and peeked into the hollow. There in the black hole a black snake writhed and hissed terribly!

Puppy leaped back. His fur stood on end and he took to his heels. Wryneck hissed at him from the hollow tree. She twisted her head, and all along her back, like a snake, coiled a stripe of black feathers.



"Woof! What' a. fright! My legs
hardly carried me away in time!
I'm not going to hunt birds
anymore. I'd do better to catch a
lizard."



Lizard sat on a rock, eyes closed, warming herself in the sun.



Quietly Puppy crept toward her — then leaped — and grabbed her by the tail.

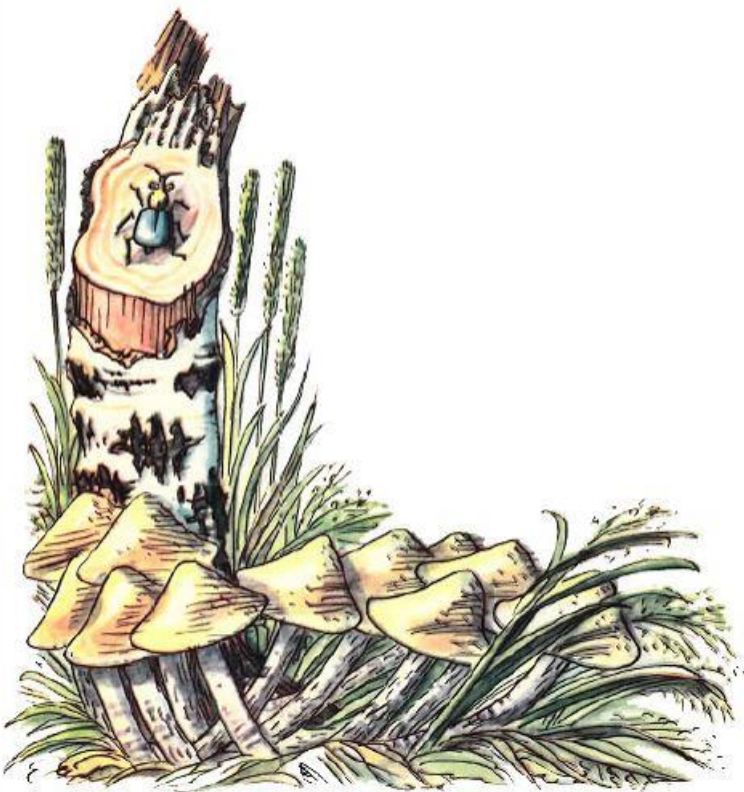


Puppy took off after them, but all of a sudden everything about him changed. It was like a special picture: all were right there, but he couldn't see them.

Green grasshoppers hid in the grass. Caterpillars stretched themselves along branches and laid very still.

Butterflies alighted on trees, closing their wings. There was no way to tell which was the bark, which the leaves, and which the butterflies.

Only tiny Bombardier Beetle crawled along the ground and did not hide.



Puppy chased after him. But Bombardier Beetle fired a quick sharp stream at the pup. It went right up his nose!

Puppy yelped and turned around; tail between his legs, he ran, over the meadow and under the gate.

He hid in the kennel and was afraid even to poke his nose out the door for a long, long time.

But the beasts and the birds and the insects once again went about their business, each in his own way.